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For Immediate Release
February 13, 2018

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With Astrodome Vote Harris County Commissioners Court Shows They Are Tone Deaf to Taxpayers
Despite a 37% property tax bill increase, no public dome vote, and no disaster reappraisal, County spends the money

HOUSTON - Harris County Commissioners Court, led by County Judge Ed Emmett, showed just how tone deaf they are to taxpayers by approving a \$105 million project to revamp the Houston Astrodome on a unanimous vote. When a \$217 million proposal to refurbish the Astrodome was put before voters in 2013 (Proposition 2) it was defeated by a 53-47% margin. The \$105 million under this proposal would include money from the County's general fund, or property tax collections.

"This is tone deaf to the needs of taxpayers," said Senator Bettencourt. **"The average taxpayer has seen their property tax bill increase by 37% in just four years, and tens of thousands more at still trying to rebuild after Hurricane Harvey. There has been no public vote on spending property tax money on a sports venue. The bottom line is that these property tax monies could have been used to cut the property tax rate or give disaster reappraisal to homeowners impacted by Hurricane Harvey."**

Data shows that the average Houston area home has endured a 37% increase on their property tax bill in just four years, from 2013 - 2017. During this same time frame, Harris County has not cut their overall property tax rate, meaning they are one of the largest increases among all the taxing jurisdictions in Harris County, collecting well over half a billion dollars more in tax collections every single year. County Judge Emmett has resisted calls to trigger disaster reappraisal to give homeowners impacted by Hurricane Harvey a break, despite several surrounding taxing jurisdictions, including the counties of Fort Bend and Montgomery, offering disaster reappraisal to impacted homeowners. Several other taxing entities, such as Katy ISD, Spring Branch ISD, and many smaller entities have also triggered disaster reappraisal. Harris County, the City of Houston, and Houston ISD have so far opted not to do so.

At a February 1 hearing of the Senate Select Committee on Property Tax Reform testimony was taken that additional taxing jurisdictions triggered disaster appraisal for their flooded out taxpayers just a few weeks ago.

"The irony of Commissioners Court spending property tax monies on the Astrodome without a public vote will not be lost on county taxpayers, especially those seeing reappraisals done by school districts and not by the county itself," continued Senator Bettencourt. **"They should have taken this plan to the public for a vote, just like the City of Houston did with their pension plan at the insistence of the Legislature."**

The bipartisan Harris County Taxpayer Protection Act was filed in the Texas Senate by Senator Whitmire (D-Houston), and joint authored by Senator Bettencourt, which would have required a public vote on an Astrodome refurbishment plan that uses property taxes, hotel and occupancy taxes (HOT), and rental taxes. However, outgoing Texas House Speaker Joe Straus blocked this bill in the House on behalf Harris County Judge Emmett.

"We just need to recognize the obvious," concluded Senator Bettencourt. **"If the County has money to ignore a public vote and refurbish the Astrodome, then they have the capability to offer flooded out homeowners disaster reappraisal and to cut their property tax rate!"**

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